

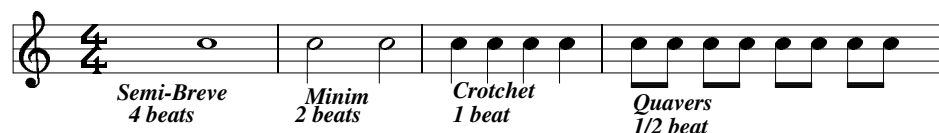
HOW TO READ MUSIC

When given the initial mechanics of reading music it is really quite easy. But, like learning to speak when you were a child, it is a slow process that will get quicker the more practice that you put in.

First let's look at the logic.

The rhythm of the piece that you are playing tells you everything you need to know about the values that will be called for to fill up one bar.

The music may be in 3/4, 4/4 or even some jazzier 5/4 and 6/4 things, but don't worry. To start with, here are the values of the notes that are in use. I have fitted them into a 4/4 time signature so that you can see how the respective values fit into the bar.



As you can see, the value of the notes divide into the bars in different permutations. One 4, two 2's, four 1's etc.

We also have to have the equivalent rests to accomodate the pauses in the melody lines. They look like this,



So by mixing these values of notes and rests together the RHYTHM of the tune is given to you.

Try this with one note. For this example play the open 2nd string.

12 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4+ 1234



The count for the above exercise is,

1,2, rest, rest.

1,2,3, rest.

1,2 rest 4&.

1,2,3,4.

First count yourself into the music, 1 2 3 4. That will be the TEMPO, the speed of the piece. From then on everthing should be divisable by the tempo. Every bar should add up to (in this case) 4 beats. Realistically, that is all there is to it.

Of course in the case of the guitar you will want to aspire to accompany melodies with chords, but first things first.

Now for the notes.

A basic OCTAVE on the guitar has eight notes in it from start to finish. That would be starting with the note of C and moving upward in steps to the note of C above it.

Let's first look at the OPEN position of the guitar.

Here are the six open strings

E A D G B E



string	6	5	4	3	2	1
fret	0	0	0	0	0	0


As you can see, these notes ascend from the lowest open string to the highest open string. So far, so good. Now we just fill in the gaps.

I think it's easier to concentrate on smaller areas when you first start to learn to

read music.

Lets learn the notes from the open 3rd string to the open 1st.

G	A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---	---



string	3	3	2	2	2	1
fret	0	2	0	1	3	0

The few notes that we have added to our open strings are the 3rd string 2nd fret, and the 2nd string 1st and 3rd frets. Play these from the bottom to the top. This is just a small part of the scale of C major. Now if I make a melody and add some rests for phrasing you will get the idea of what you can expect to see on paper.



The first thing to do is see what time signature the piece of music is in. This is in four beats to the bar, 4/4.

You can work the mechanics of this piece out for yourself from the information that you have above. At the moment it is obviously very basic. Crotchets, minims, a semi-breve to finish and the appropriate rests. The four beats are ticking away in your mind and you fill the gaps. I have done many a recording session with top musicians over the years and I could still hear them counting the beats of the bar under their breath.

This example was very basic but now let me add in some quavers.

Try this one: Count yourself in and play;



beats: 1 2 + 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 + 2 + 3 4 1 2 3 4

The beats (tempo) are ticking away in your head. Notice that the third bar doesn't start with a note but a 1/2 beat rest, so the bar actually starts on the + . Of course it easier to play tunes that you know, that way you will know if you make any mistakes. Try this one;



1 2 + 3 4

That, as I'm sure you know, is Beethoven's 9th symphony. Straight crotchets except for the last bar. Note, rest note, note, note. You know the tune so you will play it with confidence.

There are other things involved with music on paper but the only thing to add to our immediate knowledge at the moment is this.

By putting a DOT after a note the value is extended by ONE HALF. So a minim with a dot following it has a value of three. A crotchet with a dot after it has a value of ONE and ONE HALF.



beats: 1 2 3 4 1 2 + 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

So, the first bar is, 1, 2, 3, rest.

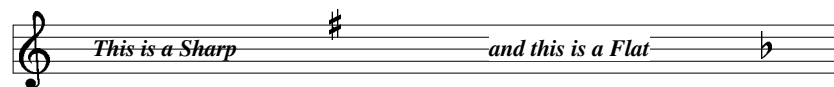
The second bar is, 1 2, + 3, 4.

The third bar is obvious and the fourth bar is just the first three beats played over

and the fourth beat of that bar is a rest.

All the time the clock that you have set, with your own count-in, is ticking in your head. Of course the rest signs can be extended with dots placed after them as well.

To finish this first lesson play these little tunes. I will throw some in that you know so you will be aware of any mistakes. Read anything else that you have at home. Concentrate on short easy tunes and, at the moment, choose pieces of music with no sharps or flats at the beginning. That is for another lesson.



The last two are in 3/4 that is waltz time. The notes still divide up in the same way but this time into 3's.

Also, the last one has the note of F in it which is the 1st string 1st fret.

You now have the basic values of the notes and the rests. All of them adding up to the overall value of the of the bar.

Three beats = the value of three notes and rests.

Four= etc.

As you practice you will see the whole recognition thing come together. If you are in 4/4 and bar has one minim in it and no other notes you need look no longer. There can be no other permutation, a minim and a minim rest.

A dotted minim and a crotchet rest gives you time to quickly look forward to the next bar and be prepared for what is coming up. This is how the greats SIGHT READERS think. It will be similar to your own development in reading English. You won't look at single words you will read overall phrases. Gradually you will read ahead of yourself. This will come with practice. Regarding practice, read anything that you can get your hands on. Be it Bach, which is very good as the music is quite mechanically phrased, or the Beatles, where you will most likely know the melody before you start.

You now have the first steps in reading music, and the real work starts now. It will seem to be labourious but keep going. Pretty soon you won't think twice about picking up a sheet of music, it could be today's greatest hit by Santana or an old solo violin piece by Bach, your procedure should always be the same; Look at the Key signature;

Sharp keys,



G	D	A	E	F#	B	major and
Em	Bm	F#m	C#m	D#m	G#m	relative minor.

Flat keys,



F	Bb	Eb	Ab	Db	Gb	major and
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Dm Gm Cm Fm Bbm Ebm relative minor.

The theory regarding the different keys, their scales and the related chords, or harmonies are explained in 'The Guitar My Way' which is available through this website.

Keep practicing, and as an old pro said to me on my first job some over thirty years ago, "read everything that you can get you hands on".